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Viewing cable 07LIMA3429, MOD BRIEFS SECRETARY GATES ON PLANS TO ENHANCE

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07LIMA3429	2007-10-17 17:04	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Lima

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SUBJECT: MOD BRIEFS SECRETARY GATES ON PLANS TO ENHANCE
INTERNAL SECURITY

¶1. (C) Summary: Senior MOD officials, including Minister of Defense Alan Wagner, briefed Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on operational plans to expand the government's control over four isolated areas of Peru: the Apurimac and Ene river valleys (the VRAE); the upper Huallaga valley; the border with Columbia; and the northern coast of Peru. All four operational plans combine targeted security operations with increased investment in health, transportation, and education to re-establish the presence of the state and win the support of local populations. The briefing emphasized the importance of Plan VRAE, which is fully funded and in the process of being implemented; the other three programs remain in the planning stage. End Summary.

A Multi-Faceted Approach -- Plan VRAE

¶2. (C) On October 5, Minister of Defense Wagner and senior defense officials briefed Secretary of Defense Gates on the GOP's plans to enhance security and state authority within Peru's borders. The GOP has given top priority to Plan VRAE, which seeks to re-establish order and combat the presence of narcotraffickers and Shining Path terrorists in the four departments comprising the Apurimac and Ene river valleys, Junin, Cuzco, Huancavelica, and Ayacucho. The VRAE produces 50 percent of Peru's cocaine and is currently under a state of emergency. More than 200,000 persons live in the area: 30 percent are illiterate, 50 percent malnourished, and 80 percent live in homes lacking both water and electricity. In response, the government of Peru has secured funding to build electrical plants, roads, water pipelines, and telephone connections in 2007 and 2008. An interagency committee, representing 11 ministries and the office of the vice president, supervises social development and cooperates with the military to increase the presence of security forces in the region and to control the lawlessness that has allowed the cocaine economy to predominate.

Putumayo, Huallaga, and Costa Norte

¶3. (C) A low level of economic development also afflicts the 10,000 persons living along the 1300 kilometer border with Colombia that follows the Putumayo River. Approximately 80 percent of the population lives in poverty, 70 percent in extreme poverty. More than 80 percent of villagers are illiterate, and more than 95 percent of homes lack electricity and water. The goal of Plan Putumayo is to integrate the region within the larger Peruvian economy by constructing roads and airports, by building primary schools, and by ending smuggling across the border. At the same time, the plan recognizes the need to send additional troops to the area, possibly an additional army battalion in 2008, to aid the 2500 soldiers already posted. The long border and dense vegetation pose challenges for troops patrolling the region, particularly since the isolated bases in the area lack the logistical support necessary to sustain operations.

¶4. (C) From 70 to 80 percent of Peru's cocaine transits through the northern coast, where small fishing villages supply vessels to transport drugs to larger ships. Plan Costa Norte seeks to enhance the navy's ability to survey and patrol waters along Peru's north coast by coordinating surface and air operations and by pooling intelligence sources from the military, national police, and Ministry of Fishing. The GOP expects that increased cooperation will not only reduce drug smuggling but also have an impact on curtailing piracy, illegal fishing, and human trafficking. The MOD noted, however, that at present, the military lacks the resources necessary to monitor the illegal activity taking place.

15. (C) Like the VRAE, the Huallaga valley contains a Sendero Luminoso column -- estimated at 60 persons -- who have increased their involvement in drug trafficking and have launched attacks against security personnel. Plan VRAE aims to eliminate the threat posed by Sendero Luminoso by bolstering the presence of the police and by increasing investment in basic infrastructure in order to create a vibrant local economy that will undercut the appeal of drug trafficking.

GOP Wish List

16. (C) Minister Wagner concluded the presentation by noting eight areas where the United States could provide aid to the GOP. Three involved military assistance: increased training in the US for Peruvian military officers; access to US satellite imagery; and funding to allow the Peruvian navy to participate in multi-national operations. Five requests involved bilateral assistance: the donation of a field hospital to assist earthquake victims; additional funding to assist Peruvian participation in international peacekeeping; support for demining efforts along the Ecuadorian border; re-establishment of the bilateral riverine program; and funding to help improve naval interdictions along the northern coast.

17. (C) In response to questions raised about Plan Putumayo, Wagner said that cooperation with Columbia is excellent -- the two sides have a treaty allowing "hot pursuit" across the border -- and the FARC has not yet established a permanent presence on Peruvian soil, although efforts to recruit local youths continue. Wagner noted that there are simply not enough police along the Putumayo river, where thick jungle makes any kind of travel difficult. Wagner also said that a lack of air mobility, particularly in the mountainous VRAE, hampers military operations. In the VRAE, for example, only one military helicopter is operational. The situation is different in the Upper Huallaga, where NAS air assets fully support police patrols.

Comment

18. (C) The MOD deserves credit for identifying transnational threats of terrorism and drug smuggling within Peru's borders as the key security challenge facing the government. Wagner recognizes as well that a purely military approach to re-establishing state control is likely to fail, and he has pursued a multi-faceted approach that responds to the underlying social and economic causes of unrest. Still, the greatest challenge for the GOP is to translate well-meaning and crucial strategic plans into concrete action. Plan VRAE, for example, was launched in December 2006 and has yet to get off the ground. The three other plans are still on the drawing boards, with the laborious process of obligating funds still pending. President Alan Garcia's first year in office has shown that while securing funding is a necessary first step in creating change, much will depend on implementation.

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